When alternating verbs fail to alternate:
the case of the locative alternation in English

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English verbs like *load* and *scatter* participate in the locative alternation (cf. Pinker 1989). In Baker and Ruppenhofer (2002) and Boas (2006), those verbs are assumed to be associated with (at least) two distinct frames, resulting in them occurring in different constructions.

(1) a. John scattered seeds in the field. (DISPERSING frame)
    b. John scattered the field with seeds. (COVERING frame)

This approach does not fully explain why supposedly alternating verbs sometimes fail to alternate.

(2) a. John scattered popcorn on the floor.
    b. *John scattered the floor with popcorn.

The present paper aims to develop a Frame Semantics approach to the alternation, arguing that an integrated frame (DISPERSING IN ORDER TO COVER) is needed to explain the behavior of those verbs.

The use of *scatter* in (1) is associated with the complex frame DISPERSING IN ORDER TO COVER. When someone deliberately applies force to seeds in order for them to cover the field, you can naturally interpret the action as directly affecting both the seeds and the field. That is, the action causes the seeds to end up being widely distributed in the field, thereby making the field ready for cultivation. Whether this variant of *scatter* occurs in one construction or the other depends on which stage of this integrated frame is in focus. The locative alternation is thus best characterized as focus shift whithin such a complex frame (See Nishimura 2003 and Nemoto 2005 for relevant discussion of a similar view).

In contrast, the use of *scatter* in (2) evokes the DISPERSING (WITHOUT INTENTION) frame. The natural interpretation of (2) is that John inadvertently dropped popcorn on the floor (e.g. because he stumbled, knocking over a bucket of popcorn). This scene cannot be viewed as the act of affecting the floor directly, leading to the impossibility of (2b). Then, why is (2a) available? One might argue that John did not act upon the popcorn directly, but that would inappropriately predict that (2a) is also unacceptable. Though John is not a prototypical agent in (2a), he can be held responsible for popcorn falling (because he can be reasonably expected to prevent the event; cf. Nishimura 1993, 1997). In this sense, John can be seen as an agent acting upon the popcorn. This makes (2a) fully acceptable.

This line of reasoning is applicable to some other verbs, as in (3) and (4).

(3) a. Bob dribbled paint on the floor.   b. *Bod dribbled the floor with paint.
                                               (CAUSING FLUIDIC MOTION WITHOUT INTENTION)
(4) b. Bob dribbled olive oil over the fish.   b. Bob dribbled the fish with olive oil.
                                               (CAUSING FLUIDIC MOTION IN ORDER TO COVER)

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